

It seems to me as if the session just started yesterday, but the fact of the matter is, we are closing in on one month. It has been the slowest month I recall in my previous six years. This session I serve on Senate Ag and Judiciary. I hold Senator Roberts responsible for that. I guess that Senate leadership thought she did such a great job that I was the logical replacement. I was a little grumpy about Judiciary in the beginning, because my experience in the General Assembly had been in Ag and Natural Resources along with Transportation and Energy. I still receive a lot of calls on Transportation issues in my new position, but I am actually enjoying the Judiciary Committee. The load has been heavy, it seems, with Judiciary Committee meeting three to four times per week. By comparison, Ag Committee has been very light.

There have not been many bills making it through to third reading and final passage. I suppose, a lot of the Senators are doing what I am doing, and that is, doing a lot of changes and redrafting prior to introduction. Only two bills have had, what I would refer to as, significant discussion. Senate Bill 5, which deals with training for concealed weapons by school personnel, has been the most misunderstood bill so far. The perception is that the General Assembly is authorizing the school personnel to carry concealed weapons; however, the fact is that it is already legal for Schools Districts to approve concealed carry by personnel in their district. In fact, about 25 school districts have enacted this policy, and most of these districts are from rural and very remote schools. This bill actually does let the County Sheriff, who must be the person to issue the permit, to set the level of training required to insure the safety of the permittee, as well as, staff and students. It had passed second reading in the Senate on a 21/14 vote, and I would expect a similar vote in third reading and will be sent to the House.

Also in Committee this week, Senate Bill 36, dealing with the appellate process for ground water. I ran this bill last year along with Senator Ray Scott. This was kind of a "slam dunk" in the House, passing 60 to 5. Politics reared its ugly head last year and was killed in the Senate. It is the opinion of this legislator that former Governor, Bill Owens, and a group of investors were buying up water rights, then attempting to sell them to municipalities. The problem is that they have lost their proposal in before Ground Water Commission, then files an appeal stating that they have more evidence. Objectors are then required to hire water engineers and attorneys to go back to court. Cost of defending your water rights can cost as much as \$100,000.00 each and every time you are in such a litigation. I have had farmers tell me they have spent in the neighborhood of \$900,000.00. If you want to break a farm operation, I can think of nothing quicker. Senate Bill 36 will change the appellate process to mirror that of surface water, which states you can appeal only on the evidence presented.

I am currently working on many bills, and they are starting to make their way through the legislative process. I plan to give you another update about my proceedings in a couple of weeks.

Senator Don Coram